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# Introduction: Everyday Narratives in World Politics

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Introductory article to forthcoming special on Everyday Narratives in World Politics,  
in *Politics*.

## Abstract

Political science and international relations scholarship increasingly places substantive emphasis on, to put it broadly, the power of discourse in shaping world politics. This special issue develops a research agenda that seeks to consolidate a set of data collection and analysis strategies that can be used in studying the way in which elite-driven discourses are legitimated and challenged; in other words, an agenda for studying everyday narratives in world politics. In doing so, the special issue makes a threefold contribution: it analyses how key themes with world politics are reproduced and narrated; it demonstrates the need to go beyond 'methodological elitism' in understanding narratives, legitimacy and world politics; and it highlights some of the methodological and practical issues in researching everyday narratives. In this introductory article, we situate the special issue within a critique of constructivist methodology broadly conceived, conceptualise everyday sites of politics, and finally, provide an overview of the articles in the issue.

## Introduction

Political science and international relations scholarship increasingly places substantive emphasis on the power of discourse and ideas in shaping world politics. This focus takes many shapes and forms. Since there is no definitively right way of conceptualising ideas and discourses, no single methodology or approach can claim a monopoly over these dynamics. For some, ideas are merely 'road maps' that reduce the uncertainty of otherwise rational action (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). Other scholars go further, arguing that social and political life possesses a fundamental uncertainty to the extent that ideas are how 'agents' are informed about the 'structures' they find themselves acting within (Wendt, 1992; Hay, 2002). Meanwhile, constructivist or discursive institutionalist approaches have critiqued other institutionalisms for their inability to explain political change, and have turned

to ideas as a way of overcoming the static conception of institutions (Hay, 2006; Schmidt, 2008). Securitisation, to take another example, theorises how 'security' has special qualities as a performative speech-act that can transform the political dynamics of a given situation (Wæver, 1995). For yet others, this focus on ideas and discourses is misplaced; instead, these scholars theorise the intersubjective character of political reality to the extent that speaking of 'ideas' or 'discourse' becomes redundant (Laffey and Weldes, 1997). In short, we are routinely told that ideas matter, but the way in which they matter varies considerably.

However, this substantive focus is accompanied by methodological strategies that tend to prioritise elite, media, and advocacy rhetoric, practices, and utterances in justifying certain interventions, building coalitions of support, and constituting the perimeters of political possibility. While this foregrounding of elites has reaped many analytical benefits, it has also produced a number of blind spots. For instance, these approaches have a general inability to grapple with questions such as: how do audiences receive or consume ideas and discourses? How is political order and transformation justified and challenged by those without formal or official power? To what extent do those outside the corridors of power obey or accept the political justifications of elites? And how are the perimeters of political possibility reproduced or resisted in the mundane practices of everyday life?

The aim of this special issue is to foreground and to promote a research agenda that goes beyond the current 'methodological elitism'. We use this term to highlight the sense that while there is often an appreciation of the role of the audience – particularly, non-elites – in legitimating and challenging elite-driven discourse, this is rarely made explicit in concrete data collection and analysis strategies. There are a number of issues bound up with this, including ethical and analytical questions regarding who is permitted to speak politics. It is 'as if elite actors... write the script, which everyday actors receive in a passive way' (Hobson and Seabrooke, 2007, p. 1).

In responding to methodological elitism therefore, this special issue poses a number of key questions:

- How are key issues within world politics narrated, reproduced, and challenged in sites of everyday practice?
- Why, if at all, is there a need to develop methodological strategies that go beyond elites in analysing these processes?

- What methodological, practical, and ethical issues are there in taking an everyday approach?

In doing so, this special issue makes a threefold contribution. In the first instance, it develops strategies to collect and analyse micro-level qualitative data without falling into methodological elitism. Second, and in turn, this informs us about *how* political order and change is legitimated and resisted in sites of everyday practice across a number of different issues within world politics. Finally, the special issue highlights some of the methodological and practical issues in researching everyday narratives. All of the articles in the special issue speak to these concerns. While some of the contributions are more likely to be found in their empirical explorations of everyday narratives (for example, Donoghue 2016, Jackson and Hall 2016, Tonkiss 2016), others are more likely to be found in methodological and conceptual reflections on how to study everyday narratives (see Jarvis and Lister 2016, Macginty and Firchow 2016, Stanley 2016, Seabrooke and Thomsen 2016).

This introduction to the special issue is comprised of three main sections. First, we provide a critique of the methodological elitism of contemporary approaches. Second, we outline the contours of our ‘everyday narratives’ research agenda, and unpack what we mean by the ‘everyday’. Lastly, we provide a brief overview of the articles in the issue, and the main contributions they make to our broader argument.

### **Beyond methodological elitism**

There are a multitude of different ways to explore the role of discourse and ideas in world politics, as well as different ways to conceptualise the central analytical focus. These include: policy ideas as objects; ideas that interact with or are embedded within institutions; media narratives; self-justifying rhetoric; performative utterances; discourse as the simultaneous constitution and limits of the political; and many others. For some, ideas and discourse are used instrumentally to co-ordinate policy-makers, build coalitions, and otherwise unite disparate actors around a set of shared objectives. In this case, actors use ideas to persuade others that a certain course of action is the right or correct one. Political communication in this context is often centred on justifying and defending a particular position or worldview. Debate can be closed down and the realms of political possibility limited. In the majority of these processes, there is an intended audience who are most often characterised by a relative lack of platform or formal power.

'Methodological elitism' is a way of capturing the way in which these approaches typically conceptualise the role of the audience or non-elites, but have difficulty incorporating concrete methodological strategies that can fully cash-out this conceptual and theoretical work and incorporate these non-elite actors analytically. In order to unpack this critique, we begin by briefly discussing two approaches that can be considered paradigmatic examples of methodological elitism, namely, discursive institutionalism and securitisation theory.

Discursive institutionalism is a popular political science approach to explaining public policy change and stasis. Although some scholars from within the tradition might dispute the notion of *one* discursive institutionalism (see, for example, Schmidt, 2012), there is nonetheless, a basic foundation shared by most proponents of this approach. Peter Hall's (1993) seminal article on the role of policy paradigms is influential in this regard (see Blyth, 2013; Baker, 2015). Hall made a distinction between three orders of policy change: third order corresponds to the ideas and assumptions that structure 'the overarching hierarchical goals that guide policy' (Hall, 1993, p. 278); second order corresponds to the institutions and policy instruments that are used in pursuing these objectives; and first order corresponds to the precise settings of those instruments. By conceptualising third order ideas as 'policy paradigms', Hall provided a means to theorise those radical moments of 'paradigm shift' whereby one set of governing ideas are rejected in favour of an alternative. This was famously used by Hall to explain the shift from Keynesianism to monetarism in 1980s Britain; others have expanded upon this initial analysis to explain the shift towards neo-liberalism more generally (see. for example, Blyth, 2002).

Others have expanded on this initial set of conceptual categories. For example, John L. Campbell (1998) and Vivien Schmidt (2008; 2010b), among others, have sought to conceptualise the role of ideas in the public policy process beyond paradigms to include, for example, the background cognitive assumptions of elite policy-makers. Table 1 below reproduces Campbell's typology in which ideas are conceptualised in four ways across two dimensions of foreground-background, and cognitive-normative. With paradigms categorized as background and cognitive, Campbell finds the space to include programs, public sentiments, and frames (see Table 1). Campbell argues that 'each type of idea exerts unique effects on policy making' (1998, p. 384). The concept of public sentiments ('public assumptions that constrain the normative range of legitimate solutions available to policy makers') are of

particular interest here. After all, when policymakers justify their solutions, they are doing so with an audience in mind, and when they do so, they ensure that their claims to rightfulness can be justified in line with ‘public assumptions’. If elite actors do not justify their actions within social maxims, ‘they may as well be talking to the wall’ (Seabrooke, 2006, p. 45).

	<b>Concepts and theories in the foreground of the policy debate</b>	<b>Underlying assumptions in the background of the policy debate</b>
<b>Cognitive level</b>	<i>Programs</i>  Ideas as elite policy prescriptions that help policy makers to chart a clear and specific course of policy action	<i>Paradigms</i>  Ideas as elite assumptions that constrain the cognitive range of useful solutions available to policy makers
<b>Normative level</b>	<i>Frames</i>  Ideas as symbols and concepts that help policy makers to legitimize policy solutions to the public	<i>Public sentiments</i>  Ideas as public assumptions that constrain the normative range of legitimate solutions available to policy makers

**Table 1** Campbell’s (1998: 385) typology of ideas

Despite the focus on how ‘foreground ideas’ must resonate with ‘background ideas’, the concept of public sentiments typically remains just that: a concept. Empirical analyses of ideas do not typically include a substantive engagement with background ideas or public sentiment. As Schmidt has written:

The ideational literature has long focused on elites as the carriers of ideas and the main agents of change. In doing so, it tends to be top-down in its approach to communication, whether because it focuses on formalized, elite processes of coordinative consultation or on elite-led processes of communicative deliberation, or indeed on both. As a result, it tends to overlook the other side of the ideational and discursive process, including the impact of the media and the public more generally (Schmidt, 2010a, p. 198).

The way in which this type of scholarship theorises 'elites as the carriers of ideas and the main agents of change' (Schmidt, 2010a, p. 198) is manifested in the associated orthodox method of process tracing, which is in turn, most often reliant upon policy and legislative texts or examples of elite rhetoric. When 'background ideas' in some sense are invoked and analysed, it is often through methodological proxies such as the media or through historical and archival analysis (see, for example, Seabrooke, 2006). There is now work from within this tradition that explicitly tackles the issue of methodological elitism (see, for example, Stanley, 2014), but it is rare.

Securitisation theory, at least in its initial formulation, similarly incorporates what we understand as methodological elitism, and in practice focuses largely on the role of elites in the securitisation process. According to its original formulators (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998, p. 32), the aim of securitisation theory is to understand 'who securitizes (Securitizing actor), on what issues (threats), for whom (referent object), why, with what results, and not least, under what conditions'. As such, securitisation as a political process is normally seen to be comprised of four main components: a securitising agent or actor who makes the initial securitising speech act (most often, a member of the elite authorised to do so); an object, actor or ideal which is identified as posing an existential or security threat; a referent object or ideal that is constructed as being in need of protection; and an audience that is the target of the securitising move and in need of persuading.

Thus, securitisation theory does in theory at least, pay attention to the potential role of the audience in influencing the successful securitisation of an issue. For instance, Roxanne Doty (1998) has argued how securitisation should be understood as a process beyond the instrumental control of elites. She suggests that although it is difficult to deny that elite actors are in a privileged position to participate in the social construction of security issues, 'it is important that we leave open the possibility that securitization of an issue can come from varied and dispersed locales, for example, from below, so to speak, from the masses' (Doty, 1998, p. 78; see also, Hansen, 2000). On a similar note, Thierry Balzacq (2005) has critiqued the securitization literature for downplaying the 'role of the audience' in his conceptual assessment of the approach. Non-elites place a constraint on the sorts and types of issues that can be socially constructed via a security logic because 'the success of securitisation is highly contingent upon the securitising actor's ability to identify with the audiences' feelings, needs and interests' (Balzacq, 2005: 184). Consequently, as

in the literature using discursive insitutionalism, there are now attempts to complement this sort of theorizing with appropriate data collection strategies (Wilkinson, 2010; Vaughan-Williams and Stevens, 2016), but these too are few and far between.

In short, three central problems with methodological elitism can be discerned. First, we simply do not know how audiences receive or mediate elite-driven discourses and ideas in any particular scenario. Do non-elites simply internalise the justifications of the elite in a largely unproblematic way? To what extent do elite discourses speak to the ways in which non-elites make sense of the world? Do everyday people openly deliberate and discuss otherwise contentious political change? If so, do they resist the official line from those with formal authority, or do they instead acquiesce? We know surprising little about how elite discourses *work* in their interaction with non-elite audiences in the real world. This is all the more surprising when we consider how central these dynamics are to contemporary understandings of the character of political power. While there is never going to be a simple or singular answer to these series of questions, the prevalence of methodological elitism nonetheless makes this a particular blind spot within the literature.

Second, by drawing the majority of data from formally authoritative sources or methodological proxies, methodological elitism is ill equipped to analyse the ways in which power relations can be embedded within the mundane aspects of everyday life. Seemingly small acts of consent and resistance can often be found within these sites, the 'common sense' character of seemingly neutral social maxims can be identified, and social relations relevant to the character of political power can be embedded in the otherwise mundane practices and lived experiences of everyday life. Stuart Hall et al., for instance, have argued that acquiescence relies upon the repetition and accumulation of expressions and beliefs 'on the streets', in 'conversations between neighbours, discussion at street-corners or in the pub, rumour, gossip, speculation' (1979, p. 129).

A third issue regarding methodological elitism relates larger questions of power and agency, and the institutional processes and structures that maintain them. If theory (or, academic research) is always *for* something and *for* some purpose (Cox, 1981, p. 128), then it could be argued that methodological elitism functions broadly to constitute and maintain the current world order and status quo. From this perspective, the focus on elites serves as a form of 'knowledge subjugation'



(Foucault, 1997, p. 7) of the ordinary, everyday knowledge that non-elite groups and individuals possess. It also reifies a notion of agency that disregards the way in which ordinary people can sometimes act collectively to force concessions and revolutionary change from elites, such as the overthrow of Milosevic, the people power movement in the Philippines, the Arab Spring, the Colour revolutions, the Occupy movement, and countless other examples. In other words, pluralising our analytical approaches and methodologies to include the everyday, vernacular sphere is more than just an analytical move; it is political in its de-subjugating, emancipatory potential.

This introduction and the articles in this special issue argue that to appreciate these everyday dynamics is simultaneously a conceptual, theoretical, and methodological concern, and that methodological strategies that place everyday actors at the centre of data collection are required to fully cash out much of the conceptual and theoretical work that has already been carried out. One way of doing this is by analysing what we call 'everyday narratives'.

### **Conceptualising the everyday**

If methodological elitism poses a challenge for many approaches sensitive to the social construction of world politics, then an obvious response is to simply collect data on the thoughts and beliefs of the public at large. For the majority of mainstream political scientists and International Relations scholars, large-scale methods that generate quantitative data would be a clear answer to this call. Public opinion surveys, as we have noted, are particularly popular in this respect, and are often used to aggregate and explain individual attitudes in the form of a generalised public opinion, or they are used to observe the causal mechanisms of micro-level political behaviour through survey experiments. These methods are valuable to those with particular epistemological concerns about demonstrating causality, or for making knowledge claims that are generalisable beyond a particular context. However, these epistemological concerns can constrain the sorts of knowledge claims available. For instance, there is little room here for analysing (or aggregating) the stories people tell about politics, how people justify their own position on various political issues, and the ways in which elite actions may be contested or resisted. Collecting quantitative data about mass attitudes and behaviours certainly have their place in the discipline, but such methods are not an especially helpful response to methodological elitism.

This special issue instead highlights and consolidates an emerging qualitative ‘everyday narratives’ research agenda. In regards to specific methods, focus groups have emerged as a widely used way to collect data on everyday narratives. Examples of focus group research in political science and international relations include, among others: Gamson (1992), Hopf (2002), Marsh, O’Toole, and Jones (2007), Jarvis, and Lister (2012), Stanley (2014), and Vaughan-Williams, and Stevens (2016). Five of the articles in this special issue – Donoghue, Hall and Jackson, Jarvis and Lister, Mac Ginty, and Stanley – employ focus groups. Other methods that have been used to study everyday narratives include: ethnography (Bubandt, 2005; Gillespie and O’Loughlin, 2009; Moss and O’Loughlin, 2008); in-depth interviews (Strauss, 2012); online ethnography (Stanley, Deville and Montgomerie, 2016); autobiography (Rosamond, 2015); and others. This plurality is reflected in the methods used by the contributors to this special issue, which also include interviews (Tonkiss 2016), and online-based research (Seabrooke and Thomsen 2016).

However, to write of ‘everyday sites of politics’ in this way is to betray the growing array of meanings and manifestations that the ‘everyday’ has come to embody within the discipline. The most popular usage of the concept of ‘everyday’ stems from those who seek to follow and contribute to Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) critique of everyday life. Matt Davies (2006; 2016) draws on this work to distinguish between ‘daily life’ and ‘everyday life’. While daily life refers to the mundane activities of our day-to-day existence, everyday life refers to the ways in which the imperatives of capitalism become embedded in that daily life to the extent that our day-to-day activities are fundamentally twisted towards the needs of capital accumulation. It is within this tradition that Paul Langley (2008) writes of the ‘everyday life of global finance’: one important aspect of financialisation is the way in which retail saving and borrowing are integrated into transnational financial networks, but this inclusion is in part dependent on the maintenance of entrepreneurial ‘investor’ subjectivities in the daily lives of millions. This conception of everyday life – a conceptual rather than descriptive category that foregrounds how mundane rhythms and spaces can be reconfigured as sites whereby the political is produced and reproduced – is interdisciplinary in scope, and many contributions come outside of politics and international relations (see, for example, Amoore, 2009; Bernazzoli and Flint, 2010).

Although its proponents have not always used the term ‘everyday’, Feminist IR has nonetheless significantly contributed to this burgeoning tradition. Perhaps due to the traditions of the wider discipline – with its focus on elite power politics,

statecraft, establishing causal relationships, and so on – feminist IR has excelled in demonstrating that ostensibly private social relations underpin and make possible the more visible and public forms of national and international politics (Enloe, 1998). Within feminist international political economy, these insights have increasingly coalesced around social reproduction: the biological reproduction of the species, the reproduction of the labour force, and the reproduction and provision of caring needs (Bakker, 2007; LeBaron, 2010). More recent scholarship has explicitly cast feminist IR as part of an ‘everyday turn’ by highlighting the way in which feminist scholars have consistently analysed ‘the co-constitutive nature of everyday gendered social relations and gendered global power relations’ (Elias and Roberts, 2016, p. 11; see also Enloe, 2011).

Meanwhile, some scholars who conduct research that falls firmly within the agenda we seek to consolidate eschew the ‘everyday’ all together, and instead use the term ‘vernacular’ (see Bubandt, 2005; Vaughan-Williams and Stevens, 2016). Vernacular refers to the informal speech used by a particular social group, and is used to contrast elite and non-elite, official and unofficial, ways of seeing and talking. Because of this meaning, the term vernacular foregrounds a *way* of speaking and of seeing the world that is particular to a type of person or group. However, the ‘everyday’ as we use it instead foregrounds a particular *site* of practice that does not presuppose a type of person or group.

The everyday politics literature provides yet another conception of the ‘everyday’. Instead of Lefebvre, the everyday politics approach draws heavily on the work of James Scott (1990) and others, and is perhaps typified by John M. Hobson and Leonard Seabrooke’s (2007) edited volume on the everyday politics of the world economy. Broadly speaking, this approach foregrounds the role of everyday actions in political change. In regards to the global economy, Hobson and Seabrooke (2007, p. 1) argue that ‘how, what and with whom we spend, save, invest, buy and produce in our ordinary lives shapes markets and how states choose to intervene in them’. This often translates into a substantive focus on ‘how existing economic structures have been undermined and new ones have been brought into being through small-scale local activities which begin as individual enactments of agency but subsequently snowball through mimetic strategies into something approaching collective action’ (Watson, 2013, p. 5).

Although the everyday politics approach specifically foregrounds everyday *action*, the approach also tends to speak of ‘small-scale’, ‘subordinate’, or indeed ‘everyday’

*actors* that are contrasted against the powerful. In many ways, this distinction between elite and everyday actors makes sense. As Hobson and Seabrooke make clear (2007, p. 13), the concept of *legitimacy* plays a central role in the everyday politics approach. Legitimacy is typically used to study how and why the ruled consent to the power of the rulers, and so a divide between the powerful and powerless is required. Rather than the everyday as a *site* however, the everyday is therefore equated with a particular *type* of powerless actor. This powerless or everyday actor, in turn, reflects a particular and rather narrow vision of what politics entails (on which, see Hay, 2007; Jenkins, 2010), as well as a particular notion of agency in world politics. This conception of the everyday actor only makes sense when politics (and agency) is equated with governments, states, and the intentional efforts to influence them (or, in IR, the top-down regulation of the international system by powerful states and international organizations).

We therefore prefer to conceive of the everyday as a *site of practice* (where actors exercise agency and some degree of autonomy), rather than a *type* or *category* of actor. Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet's (2005) work is useful in fleshing out this conception. His starting point is to define politics as not only about the control, allocation, production, and use of resources, but also *the values and ideas underlying those activities* (Kerkvliet, 2009, p. 227). When understood in this way, politics ceases to be synonymous with the formal activities of governments and states, since the allocation (and the values and justifications underlying those activities) of important resources is rarely confined to these spaces. Resources are often distributed in corporations, factories, universities, families, and numerous other sites and institutions (2009, p. 229). Crucially, however, the distribution of these resources – on whatever scale – is constantly contested through whether the values and justifications they are based upon are seen to be just. This, for Kerkvliet, is what politics is and what it involves.

On the basis of this definition, Kerkvliet then goes on to distinguish between three different types of politics: *official*, *advocacy*, and *everyday*. Official politics involves authorities in organisations 'making, implementing, changing, contesting, and evading' policies over the allocation of resources (2009, p. 231). The actors in this form of politics typically hold positions of authority, in that they are authorised (in different ways) to make decisions or hold an important but perhaps indirect role in the wider decision making process. Advocacy politics involves the intentional and direct attempts at influencing authorities, and thus the way in which resources are

allocated (2009, p. 232). As Kerkvliet points out, advocates are 'straightforwardly, outwardly, and deliberately aiming their actions and views about political matters to authorities and organisations, which can be governments and states but need not be' (Ibid). Political science and political economy tend to focus on these activities, resulting in a relatively narrow focus.

In contrast, everyday politics involves 'people embracing, complying with, adjusting, and contesting norms and rules regarding authority over, production of, or allocation of resources' (Ibid). The key way in which everyday politics differs from official and advocacy politics is the lack of organisation and the often seemingly non-political nature of the actions in question (Ibid; see also Scott, 1990). This mirrors Hobson and Seabrooke's understanding of everyday politics (2007, p. 1-15). Seemingly mundane struggles over what is considered both procedurally fair and morally 'valid' action in line with how the economy ought to work may not be considered overtly political, but can legitimate certain interventions (Seabrooke, 2006, p. 46). This is crucial as a reminder that, at a basic and almost counterfactual level, those without the direct authority or influence over official politics still have a capacity to influence political and economic change through rejecting or conferring the claims of the governed (Hobson and Seabrooke, 2007, p. 3). That is, they retain agency in politics.

This typology highlights the disadvantages of the otherwise useful ruler-ruled distinction. Everyday politics is not intrinsically linked to one's position in society. This is because even a politician who is normally engaged in official politics, or an activist who is normally engaged in advocacy politics, will still have to take part in society through the constant everyday negotiation and contestation of norms about the allocation of resources. The everyday, then, is not a signal of one's position in politics or the economy. It is instead a *site*, and not normally a place or activity that one can choose to opt into or out of unless they opt out of society itself.

### **Conclusion: Overview of the articles and future agenda**

In this introduction, we have attempted to explain the limitations of methodological elitism, some of the main approaches to 'everyday politics', and the broad questions and issues we are concerned with in this special issue. We will end this introduction by briefly outlining the overall contribution of the special issue, while providing an overview of the articles, before finally sketching out some challenges for an everyday narratives research agenda.

As a first contribution, all of the articles in the special issue highlight how political orders are justified and contested in everyday sites by focusing on particular themes and issues within world politics. Jackson and Hall (2016), for instance, explore everyday narratives of terrorism through a series of focus groups in the UK. They analyse the collective 'grid of intelligibility' through which terror and non-terror events are categorised and interpreted, and the process through which they provide legitimacy to counter-terrorism measures. While elite discourses of terrorism are to an extent dominant, Jackson and Hall show that these understandings can diverge in politically important ways within everyday sites of practice.

Like Jackson and Hall, Donoghue (2016) finds that while elite discourses tend to frame the way in which participants make sense of politics, everyday narratives can contaminate and thereby shift or challenge these discourses. By analysing everyday narratives of Community Cohesion – an important part of New Labour's social policy agenda – Donoghue shows how some of the language and concepts used in policymaking unevenly filtered down onto the ground. Similarly, Tonkiss (2016) argues that everyday narratives of migration among *non-migrants* provide important insights into the obstacles to migration rights to equal opportunity within everyday life. By demonstrating how non-migrants consistently reproduced 'banal' discourses of national identity in their everyday lives, Tonkiss critiques normative political theory accounts of unrestricted migration. Jarvis and Lister (2016), Mac Ginty and Firchow (2016), Seabrooke and Thomsen (2016), and Stanley (2016) provide similar insights for the issues of counter-terrorism policy, meanings of peace, and fiscal austerity respectively.

As a second contribution, all of the articles in the special issue highlight the methodological and practical issues in researching everyday narratives. Jarvis and Lister (2016) ask their focus group participants what they would do about terrorism if they were the government. They find that asking this question leads to a more productive engagement that goes beyond reporting on public dissatisfaction about counter-terror measures. They therefore demonstrate that studying the public imaginations of political alternatives can have both normative and analytical value. In a similar vein, Mac Ginty and Firchow (2016) report on their project to create 'Everyday Peace Indicators' based on research in four sub-Saharan African countries. By beginning with everyday narratives rather than elite stories, they construct a different, more meaningful way, and in some ways, surprising method of measuring peace. Both articles therefore demonstrate the analytical and normative benefits of

foregrounding everyday sites of practices in making sense of world politics. Meanwhile, Seabrooke and Thomsen (2016) build a framework for analysing everyday narratives by conceptualising the links between storysets, story lines, and plots. They then apply this to online comments on newspaper articles about fiscal austerity in the UK and Denmark. Similarly, Stanley (2016) outlines a methodology for using focus groups to study the way in which everyday narratives confer legitimacy onto elite action. By explicitly unpacking the methodological basis for conducting focus groups, the article provides a clear roadmap for future studies of that kind. Tonkiss (2016), meanwhile, shows how analysing everyday narratives can provide insights for normative political theory.

Taken as a whole, then, the special issue thus demonstrates the advantages of going beyond 'methodological elitism' in understanding narratives and legitimacy and world politics. As a result, the special issue provides a number of lessons for political scientists and international relations scholars. The first lesson relates to how elite discourses are simultaneously reproduced and contested in everyday political sites. The way in which elite discourse and the limits of political possibility are justified and contested in everyday sites can be surprising or not, but they cannot simply be taken for granted. The second lesson is that if you want to know how people make sense of world politics, then it makes sense to ask them. This is particularly important for constructivist studies, broadly conceived, which sometimes claim to analyse elite discourse and rhetoric as a means to understanding processes of legitimacy or delimiting political possibility. As this special issue demonstrates, it cannot be taken for granted that these discourses are simply taken at face value by the publics that elites must justify their actions to. A third lesson is that there are many different tools for analysing everyday narratives. While there is no right or wrong approach or method, it is nevertheless clear that a strong degree of methodological reflexivity is required.

Although we feel that an everyday narratives approach provides a useful and novel set of tools and practices for researching world politics, we are also keen to stress that it is no panacea. It remains a work in progress as a substantive research agenda. Future research should address the following three challenges. First, what sort of knowledge claims about world politics can be made from studying everyday narratives? Qualitative research always faces this question, but acquiescing to the entrenched positivist norms of the wider discipline is ultimately unhelpful. A degree of reflexivity over the type and character of knowledge claims is nonetheless crucial,

as are concrete methodological strategies. Second, what sorts of power relations manifest in the sort of data collection and analysis methods employed in research such as that contained in this special issue? The ethical and methodological issues surrounding focus group moderation, for example, have been pored over by qualitative researchers from other disciplines. Claiming to speak for, or represent, sites of everyday practice is far from straightforward. Third, to what extent is it possible to 'access' everyday sites for the purpose of research? Interviews and focus groups are contrived situations that often involve participants speaking in exchange for money or other incentives. Either this sort of data should be considered as somehow contaminated or inauthentic, or interview situations need to be themselves conceptualised as a type of everyday site in which people are constantly negotiating their identity and telling stories as in any other form of social interaction.

These challenges notwithstanding, an overall ambition of this special issue is to suggest a selection of tools and concepts to help in the process of analysing everyday narratives in world politics, and to show that the way in which political orders are justified and contested in everyday sites provides crucial insights into contemporary power. This special issue is also driven – perhaps ultimately so – by a desire to demonstrate that this sort of qualitative and micro-level research is both worthwhile and legitimate in a discipline that tends to value other sites and other methods.



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